



LINCOLN CHAFEE

U.S. SENATOR

RHODE ISLAND

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Tuesday, February 21, 2006

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SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIRMAN CHAFEE REACTS TO KEYSTONE DECISION

Praises Efforts of Participants in Keystone Working Group

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senator Lincoln Chafee (R-RI), Chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, and Water of the Committee on Environment and Public Works (EPW), has received a letter from the Keystone Center, which has completed its findings of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) Working Group on Critical Habitat. Keystone sent the letter summarizing its findings and areas of consensus. Today Chafee lauded the efforts of the 23 participants in the Keystone project for taking the time to explore this difficult issue.

Chafee spearheaded the request that Keystone Center (Keystone) initiate a dialogue among stakeholders on the issue of critical habitat. Keystone is a non-profit organization specializing in neutral, professionally managed dialogue, mediation and facilitation.

The group reiterated the need for Congress to “take steps that would improve the law’s effectiveness for the species at risk, make government activities more efficient, and reduce the concerns of regulated parties.” Release of the full report is expected at the end of the month.

Keystone was unable to offer a consistent, consensus-based approach on how to alter the existing critical habitat provisions to increase effectiveness. Critical habitats are areas designated as essential to the conservation of a species, and are necessary for the recovery of an endangered or threatened species. Development may be limited in areas designated as Critical Habitat. Since habitat loss is the most prevalent cause of endangerment, protection is essential to conserve endangered and threatened species and the ecosystems upon which they depend. Interpretations of Critical Habitat provisions in the ESA have been subject to heated debate and criticism, and led to a multitude of lawsuits as to the intent of Congress on this issue.

“First, I would like to thank the 23 participants in the Working Group on Critical Habitat for taking time out of their busy schedules to help find a way to move forward with necessary changes to this critical legislation in a way which will take into consideration the interests of all stakeholders,” Senator Chafee said.

“The findings of the Keystone Center are clear: the ESA could do a more effective job in preserving habitats, and therefore restructuring the current framework to shift habitat protections toward recovery standards must be the ultimate goal. While it is unfortunate that a consensus could not be reached on how to transform the existing critical habitat framework, there is no doubt that change is necessary, and much work is needed to achieve the end result of crafting a law that would do a better job of protecting and conserving the habitat that endangered species need to recover,” Chafee continued.

“As Critical Habitat is one of the Endangered Species Act’s most debated and litigated provisions, I look forward to working with Senators Inhofe, Jeffords, and Clinton to craft legislation which will explore new ways to address this issue. Similar to the efforts of my father, Senator John Chafee (R-RI), in moving forward the Endangered Species Recovery Act of 1997, I believe it is possible to pursue bipartisan legislative options for the ESA”

“The ESA has provided critical safeguards to species and their habitats and, despite its flaws, has been a success. The reintroduction of wolves in Yellowstone National Park; the current delisting of the American Bald Eagle from the endangered species list; and even the management of the threatened piping plover in Rhode Island are all examples of the power of the ESA to protect and recover species. We find ourselves in a position to take a hard look at the effectiveness of the ESA and how successful it has been at recovering species and bringing them back from near extinction.”

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